

# Remarkable Scottish Poisoners.

(CAUSES CÉLÈBRES.)

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DR E. PRITCHARD,

THE GLASGOW POISONER.

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“ Give me a man that is not passion’s slave,  
And I will wear him in my heart’s core—  
Yea, in my heart of hearts.”

*Hamlet, Act I., Scene 2.*

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# REMARKABLE SCOTTISH POISONERS.

(*CAUSES CÉLÈBRES.*)

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Dr E. PRITCHARD.

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LATE on the evening of 21st March 1865, as the train from Edinburgh reached the Glasgow station, a gentlemanly looking man stepped out of a first-class carriage.

The student in physiognomy would have seen at a glance that the traveller was ill at ease. The superficial observer might notice nothing out of common ; but the student, accustomed to look below the surface, would judge differently. There was a thief-like gleam in the eye, a pallor most unnatural in the cheek. There were wrinkles on the forehead, not planted there by the mystic hand of time, for our friend is even then rejoicing in the

bloom of early manhood. There are nervous twitches continually playing round the corners of the mouth, which prove unmistakably that inwardly the man is ill at ease, although there is an attempt to keep up an appearance of outward coolness.

As his foot touched the platform, a policeman laid his hand gently upon his shoulder, and declared him to be his prisoner. The gentleman, who was dressed in deep mourning, was Dr E. W. Pritchard, who had just been in Edinburgh burying his wife. The charge on which he was arrested was the very serious one of having poisoned his mother-in-law, Mrs Taylor, also his wife, Mrs Pritchard.

Mrs Taylor was a lady of great amiability of temperament. Her friends all belonged to a most respectable class in society. She possessed a large circle of friends in the northern capital, among whom she was universally beloved ; especially among religious friends in Edinburgh Mrs Taylor was held in high estimation. The religious denomination to which she and her husband belonged had been duly impressed with a sense of her gifts and graces. She was active as a member of the congregation, and most liberal in her donations in behalf of religious schemes.

The news of the arrest spread like wildfire through Glasgow and the whole of Scotland. Few physicians were more popular than Dr Pritchard—his manners were genial, his professional reputation considerable, his character among all classes, up till the moment of his arrest, unstained, so that the *fama clamosa* at first was rejected by the entire community.

After a while people began to remember that a very suspicious event had but lately occurred in the household of Dr Pritchard, which at the time had been allowed to pass unnoticed. One evening the family of Dr Pritchard were aroused from their sleep by the startling cry of the policeman of "Fire, fire." Each hurried out to the street almost naked, eager to find a place of safety from the devouring element. At first it was thought with gratitude that the entire household had escaped, but it soon was discovered that one of the female servants who slept in the attic was still absent. Some one ventured to enter the burning house in search of the absent domestic. On reaching the room in which she slept, it was found locked on the outside. On entering, a harrowing spectacle met the sight. The poor girl, stretched on her bed, was burned to death. Afterwards a medical examination took place, when to the horror of everybody it was



known that the poor creature was discovered to have been some time with child. The character of Dr Pritchard stood so high among all classes of the community no suspicion at first rested upon him ; but from what was revealed at the trial for the murder of his wife, there was no doubt but he was the father of the unborn child, and the murderer of his young domestic.

The bodies of his wife and mother-in-law having been exhumed, a most searching analysis was made, and soon antimony, one of the most deadly poisons, found in the intestines of both.

Shortly after Dr Pritchard was placed in the dock of the Justiciary Court, Edinburgh, and the trial proceeded in the usual way. Unfortunately the evidence of the guilt of the prisoner was very clear. The first witness who gave evidence against him was his own servant, Catherine Latimer. Mrs Latimer had been for several years a widow. She gave her evidence very reluctantly, and wished, as far as she could, honestly tried to protect her master, Dr Pritchard. She said she was the cook, and all the food used by the family was prepared by herself. The evidence against the prisoner was very precise. Mrs Latimer remembered preparing food, which, when taken by Mrs Pritchard, produced sickness and violent vomit-

ings. Especially did she recollect the day and the circumstances connected with the sickness and illness of Mrs Taylor. She remembered preparing tapioca, which, when taken for supper by Mrs Taylor and the doctor's wife, produced most painful consequences. In February 1865 Dr Pritchard's mother-in-law, then his guest in his house in Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow, partook of some food, prepared, as cook, by her. During the night she was seized with severe cramp, and most violent retchings. At once medical attendance was procured, but in vain. After the most acute suffering, Mrs Taylor expired, 25th February 1865.

Some few days after, Mrs Pritchard became suddenly unwell, accompanied with symptoms very like those of her mother, Mrs Taylor. Mrs Pritchard complained frequently of being unable to account for the cause of her terrible fits of sickness, after partaking of the most simple food. One night Mrs Latimer was startled by the ringing of the bell in Mrs Pritchard's bedroom. On hurrying up she found her mistress in great agony. Dr Pritchard was with his wife trying to soothe her, but all in vain. After a scene in the chamber almost as horrible as the murder scene in Shakespeare's "Macbeth," with her husband pretending to shed tears of sorrow, the poor

woman succumbed to the poison which had been given her, and died amidst severest sufferings.

The witness who caused the greatest sensation, as she appeared in the witness-box, was his young child's maid, Mary M'Leod. Her evidence was of the most fearful nature. She said she was about fifteen years of age when she entered the family of Dr Pritchard as nursery maid to his youngest child. It seems the bright looks and hazel eyes of Mary soon began to work their witcheries on the sensualised physician. Under promise of marriage when his wife died, he managed to force and seduce the child. Mrs Pritchard having seen one day what was going on, she charged her faithless husband with his wickedness. On a promised amendment on his part, she, wife-like, forgave him, never suspecting that from that moment she was herself a doomed woman. One day, from his own dinner table, his wife being confined to her bedroom, Dr Pritchard sent her up a small bit of cheese, which was eaten by his victim. Mrs Pritchard rapidly became very ill as the night advanced. Another scene, only of a much more terrific character than what had happened the evening her mother died, took place in her bedroom. In her death-agony, calling her husband "a hypocrite and a nasty low



man," showing that she remembered his ongoings with her servant, Mary M'Leod, the spirit of the murdered wife passed away from earth.

Two of the young gentlemen, who were residing in Dr Pritchard's house as pupil boarders, were put into the witness-box, and testified to the state of health and general daily habits of Mrs Pritchard.

Both of these young men belonged to most respectable families, and were themselves personally of very high character. Not only did Dr Pritchard poison his wife, but in the basest and most cruel manner after her death sought to blacken her reputation. His false and unblushing statement was that his wife nearly broke his heart by her intemperate habits, and that her sudden demise was the natural consequence of these practices. The evidence, however, of the young gentlemen boarders, Thomas Alexander Connel, and of his companion, Richard John Christian King, refuted such base and unjust statements at once. The testimony which they bore to Mrs Pritchard's sober habits strangled for ever the foul and heartless accusation. Little did Dr Pritchard imagine when he consented to accept his medical pupils as boarders into his family, that they would one day rise up in judgment against him ; neither did his gentle wife

ever think as from day to day she performed her deeds of almost motherly affection to these "strangers within her gates," that they would prove her triumphant vindicators, purifying from her memory, as she lay festering in her shroud, the stain thrown upon her character by her faithless husband.

As before mentioned, in defence it was insinuated that the wife of the prisoner had been given to intemperate habits, and that she had died in a state of intoxication. But the evidence of Mr Thomas Alexander Connel, and of his companion, Richard John Christian King, was conclusive enough to show that such was far from the truth.

When the son and daughter of the murdered woman were raised up on the witness stand, the scene became fearfully affecting ; indeed there was scarcely a dry eye in court ; even the very judges in their ermine wept when Master Charles Pritchard, the eldest son of the prisoner, a lovely intelligent boy of about eleven years of age, along with his sister, Jane Pritchard, aged fourteen, gave their evidence in favour of their father, stating in their young silvery voices how lovingly and affectionately their parents had lived together.

The dress and general appearance of the children of the murdered woman were very attractive. The fair hair,

lovely blue eyes, and yellow locks of Master Pritchard produced a most affecting impression upon every beholder. Both of the children seemed unconscious of the important part they were playing in the fearful tragedy. With the open frankness of childhood they gave their evidence, and answered the questions kindly put to them in the most innocent and gentle manner. They testified to the hourly and daily proofs they had witnessed of affection bestowed on the part of their father, Dr Pritchard, to his partner in life. Many acts of endearment they declared they had seen, but their evidence only blackened the character of Dr Pritchard more than ever. The deep hypocrisy of the man appeared unmasked on the testimony of his own children. With thoughts of murder in his heart, but kisses of treachery on his lips, he, morning by morning, led on gently his unsuspecting victim to her fearful doom, under the mocking guise of husband-like tenderness.

But all in vain. The evidence of the doctors, Douglas Maclagan and Henry Littlejohn, gave testimony on soul and conscience of having discovered in the bodies of mother and daughter such symptoms as led them to assert, without any shadows of doubt, that both had died from the effects of poison.

The Solicitor-General on behalf of the Crown pressed



for a sentence of condemnation. In a most masterly manner he examined the evidence against the prisoner, and called on the jury to pronounce a verdict of guilty. On behalf of Dr Pritchard, Mr A. R. Clark, one of the most eloquent of pleaders, said everything that could be pleaded on behalf of the prisoner at the bar. In the hands of such a consummate master of forensic skill and eloquence as Mr Clark, Dr Pritchard could suffer nothing from such able pleadings. The Lord Justice Clerk summed up in a most judge-like style; holding in his hands which did not tremble the even balance of justice, he asked the jury to say unbiassedly, as they would answer to Almighty God, what they thought of the evidence. At ten o'clock on the morning of the 7th of July, the Lord Justice Clerk, Lord Ardmillan, and Lord Jerviswood took their seats on the bench, and called for Dr Pritchard to be brought before them. On the conclusion of a most able charge on the part of the Lord Justice Clerk, the jury retired for due deliberation. During their absence the silence in the Court was of the most painful character, so deep the quietude you could almost count the beating of the prisoner's heart, who, although ghastly white, looked cool and collected. After a little while the twelve men returned, who held in their hands the life or death of a fellow-creature. Every



ear was stretched to hear the verdict, which was, Guilty of the death of both victims. Immediately on the verdict being given, the judge took stealthily from his pocket the black cap of doom, and placing the emblem of death upon his head, in words whose solemn tones will never be forgotten by any who heard them, sentenced Dr Pritchard to be hung in Glasgow, and his property to be escheated to the Crown.

The accessories connected with the double murder made the crime of Dr Pritchard peculiarly atrocious. The relationship which both bore to the prisoner ought, if nothing else, to have hindered the foul deed. When Macbeth contemplated the "taking off" of King Duncan, the chief thing which he said ought to have hindered him in his deed of blood was the fact that his victim was his unsuspecting guest. How much more should the nearer relationship of the unhappy ladies have been as a "wall of fire around them" for their safety. The hypocrisy connected with the deed of blood was peculiarly offensive. When the victims were writhing in their agony he, their murderer, stood near, and in words of affection pretended to give them the healing draught of medicine. How foul, unspeakably foul, the wrong ongoing with the young, innocent, and loving Mary M'Leod. The serpent-

like manner in which the seducer, already husband and father, stole upon his young victim was very hateful. His wrongful kiss and horrid embrace, his presents, his promise of marriage after his wife was dead, made his poisonous actions almost pale their lurid hideousness. No doubt Mary M'Leod was personally greatly to blame; although very young, still she was old enough to be quite conscious of the terrible wrong she was committing towards her mistress. But everybody must feel that the heavy part of the burden lay on the shoulders of the tempter and the seducer, Dr Pritchard. At first more than likely Dr Pritchard meant neither the seduction of the maid, nor the murder of her mistress, only he would think he might indulge himself in a little innocent dalliance.

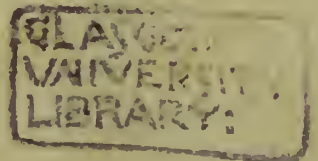
What a fearful warning is here, especially to the young and thoughtless, to avoid the first approaches of evil! The almost universal sin of unchastity is seen here in its naked hideousness and fearful punishment. The ears of the young are as the deaf adder—they refuse to listen until it is too late, and the leprous defilement is upon them. There is no sin which is more out and out ensnaring than that of uncleanness, and yet its victims will not be warned by the terrible endings of those like Dr

Pritchard who have gone before them. They drain the cup which tastes so sweetly, and refuse to see the bitter dregs which lie at the bottom. The present is so agreeable in all its sensations, the future with its shadows of blackness cannot terrify.

Oh that terrible future ! Shakespeare, who seems to have known all things, says—

“O that a man might know  
The end of this day’s business ere it comes,  
But it sufficeth that the day will end,  
And then the end is known.”

—*Julius Cæsar, Act II., Scene 1.*



UNIFORM WITH THIS, TENTH THOUSAND.

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